II

Nomadic Life

484 512 THE KAINGÁNG USED TO WANDER about in the forest in small bands searching for food. Even now when they go hunting they rarely stay even a week in one place. They fall asleep without plans for the morrow, and they awaken in the morning without any idea of what they are to do. A few words over the morning fire may decide them to move on, and in ten minutes their possessions will be packed into baskets. The father strides off carrying his weapons in his hands: the indispensable axe and a gun or a massive seven-foot bow and a dozen arrows, while the mother comes plodding behind with the basket full of household possessions and the remaining food, if they are lucky enough to have any, the baby perched atop the load and the brother or sister holding on to her left hand, the right bearing a smoking firebrand for use at the next camp.

342 The Kaingáng hate to build the frail little shelters they call houses, and they never do so until the rain is on them. I always had to argue with the Indians to help put up my tent. When the clouds piled up in the sky, the air grew sultry, and the sun changed from yellow to dull red, I would say to Chukembégn, "It looks like rain." With a deprecatory glance at the sky he would reply: "No, it's not going to rain—not today. Tomorrow maybe, but today, no." "But look at those clouds." "That's nothing; it will pass." "Yes, the way it passed yesterday. Let's get the tent up, Chukembégn." At last the tent would be put up, sometimes as the first drops fell or in a pouring rain. It was not laziness that made them so slow to put up my tent, for they too could always take advantage of it; but housebuilding is simply an annoyance, and they never raise a shelter even for themselves unless they are forced to. It rains several times a day at the new moon in fall and winter, but though they know this perfectly well, they will not build a

2: Henry E-5 (1932-1934) 1941

SM3 Caingang SM3

Aweikoma

to his wife, kicking Klendó in the ear and overturning Amendó's pot in his semi-somnambulism. All of this makes ethnology terribly difficult, for it is hard to be sure that the dark mass you had decided was Yakwá an hour ago isn't Vomblé or just the shadow of the house post now. 513

Kaingáng camp sites are any shape at all. Level ground is rare and what there is is so irregular that the Indians have to distribute themselves about it in the most economical way possible. But they will never sleep on any kind of slope, and if a particular patch of level ground is just a little too small for a family they may build it up by throwing some dirt on a foundation of leaves. When a woman sits down, lays her firebrand on the ground, piles wood on it, and begins to nurse her baby, it is pretty certain that camp will be made right there. No woman sits down without deliberation, for where she sits she stays, and where she stays she and her husband will sleep. Nothing can dislodge her, and no one will dare to suggest that she move over. It is a matter of complete indifference to her that the spot she has picked out may be such that a large family will have to break up in order to conform to her choice. 361 562

After she has nursed her baby, eaten a few nuts, and perhaps put the pot on to boil she gets up and cleans the ground, pushing the surface litter back for a pillow, chopping out the protruding roots, scraping and leveling until it is "clean." Then off she goes for ferns to cover the site, sometimes walking half a mile to get the exact kind she wants. When this is all done the camp looks inviting, but next day, after fifty bare feet have walked, run, fought, or toddled over it and the soup has been spilled, it is untidy and dirty. By the end of a week, if they should stay so long, dirt has piled up around the camp—nut shells, pieces of animal hides, fruit skins, bones, palm-shoot shells, wasp's nests from which the larvae have been taken and eaten, basket splints, and human and animal offal—and the place has a repellent odor. 364

The Kaingáng are awake an hour before dawn. The young men lie huddled together under their blankets, sometimes five or six of them in a row, chattering and laughing, while the married men shout across from their beds with their wives and someone perhaps lies singing quietly to himself. At last a fire is stirred and a woman or a child goes for water. By dawn the pots are on the fire, and the campers are beginning to shake the stiffness out of their bodies. Perhaps some young woman still lies lazily nursing her child while her young husband sits on her feet to keep them warm. Men begin to take down their bows and bend them against their legs, and arms like wrestlers' swell and bend as the bows are drawn. A famished dog yelps as its owner beats it for stealing food; a woman growls at her child in mild, helpless anger as it defecates in camp. The men circulate around while the women sit quietly nursing their children or eating. 512

2: Henry E-5 (1932-1934) 1941
SM3 Caingang SM3
Aweikoma

5/2 At last a word or a half-suggested idea decides the plan of the hunt, and they are ready to go. They are on their feet or sitting down with their weapons between their legs, stuffing the last bits of food into their mouths, for they will not eat again until long after sundown unless they are lucky enough to find a beehive. Finally, with a last hurried mouthful and a shout to his hollow-bellied dog, the hunter disappears in the forest.

5/2 224 The early sun slants through the trees. The ground is damp; the undergrowth is wet with dew, and the air is chilly. The Indian is strung to the highest pitch, for he must make of his mind a sensitive instrument responsive to the slightest influence around him: to the trembling of a leaf that may reveal a bird, to the faint marks on the trunks of trees that tell where honey is, or to the confused sounds of animal calls that betray the tapir or the monkey. Most birds are just black spots among the foliage for their lovely plumage is their protective coloring, and to the unpracticed eye they are lost among the leaves. A tiny, wax-covered hole—the entrance to a hive—the faint scratches of the claws of a honey-eating animal or his burrow at the base of a tree, or the pecking of the woodpecker, reveal where there is honey. The hunter must be on the alert for all these things, and he must look carefully underfoot for the tracks of animals for on these more than on anything else his life depends. This complete absorption in forest sounds and signals makes conversation almost impossible, and if the hunter talks at all it is in whispers and only about matters immediately at hand. Even if he has to shout a message to some companion it is in a Kaingáng whisper, a high tone of low intensity that floats through the forest like the most delicate topmost notes of a well-trained tenor.

As he plods uphill and down, uphill and down, almost always on a slope, rarely on level ground, the sun mounts higher, sharpening the shadows, intensifying the green. Suddenly there is a rush of wings as some *ururús* fly to another perch. The hunter watches their short, low flight until they stop twenty feet away from their previous resting-place. Then he sets down his iron arrows and barbed ones and selects a couple with nothing but wooden knobs on the end. Now he steps forward carefully, parting the thick foliage as he slips through, although he need not be so careful, for the *ururú* is a stupid bird. Now he stops and lays an arrow across his bow as he prepares to draw. The trees, the bushes, and the vines are thick around him, and a tangle of vines and bushes half hides the birds. With a branch jabbing him in the ribs and another tickling his ear he twists his body awkwardly as he bends his bow, pulling the string with his right hand and pushing the bow away from him with his left. The shoulders and the muscles of the back and chest are called into play when a Kaingáng bends his bow. His whole torso and his two arms suddenly expand like a spring as he draws the string back almost to his ear.

2: Henry E-5 (1932-1934) 1941
SM3 Caingang SM3
Aweikoma

512 224 When one of those great bows that the Kaingáng also use for clubs is bent, the strain is so great that a man's whole body tends to quake and shiver. The handling of a Kaingáng bow in the thick foliage where the ground is slippery underfoot and a dozen twigs and branches get in the way, where the light is dim and a mass of vines and leaves half obscure the target, calls for perfect coordination and the control of every muscle. The largest game bird, the jacutinga, appears generally as a black spot high up among the trembling leaves, and the branch on which it stands is almost always between the bird and the hunter. As it fills its maw with berries it turns nervously from side to side—it is a fluctuating spot in uncertain and gloomy surroundings. No wonder that our friend misses his *urumú*, and that the Indians often miss. With a grunt of disgust he goes on, down the hill and across a brook, up the other slope, and then down through a mass of bamboo to a stream. He stands in the water up to his knees, undecided for a moment which way to go. Then he wanders along the stream, stepping with automatic and perfect balance from stone to stone until he finds a place to climb out. His powerful toes hook into the tough damp clay at the water's edge, and he lifts his two hundred pounds by his toes, as self-assured as a ballet dancer, on to the high bank. Now from far up on the side of the hill comes a macaco's whistle, faint and clear, and the hunter beats his way toward it, imitating almost perfectly the monkey's high and [225] penetrating whistle. I never learned to distinguish the macaco's whistle from the Indian's imitation.

As he nears the top of the hill, his breath whistling between his teeth, the monkeys are visible—little black bundles high up in a tree. "The sun is slanting," as he says, for it is growing late, and we have been out all day without a thing to eat. He climbs up past the tree so that he can shoot downhill. The first barbed wooden arrow hisses vainly through the leaves, to land somewhere far off down the hill. A second arrow pierces a monkey and knocks it from its tree. A third and fourth follow the first. The fifth sends the second monkey hurtling, and he falls dead in a tangle of brambles. Five arrows for two monkeys. The heads of the two arrows that found their marks are torn loose from the shaft and will have to be rebound. The three others are lost in the pathless tangle but it is too late to look for them. Next day he returns to search, following his own tracks back through the undergrowth that almost conceals them. The bush is so heavy that he cannot raise his arms or legs until he frees them from the vines that hold them like a net. Round and round he goes, looking about and up in the trees, for perhaps one of his arrows fell among the branches. After each circuit of the area he returns to the tree where the monkeys were and makes note of the trajectories of his arrows, pointing his arm along them. At last he finds [225] two, but where is the third? After almost three hours of constant searching

2: Henry E-5 (1932-1934) 1941
SM3 Caingang SM3
Aweikoma

512
224
[825]

he sees it high in another tree, and up he goes to get it, for if he left it there it would weep and weep until, perhaps, its soul would come and kill him.

All through the morning he climbs the hills. Ticks come upon him in clods like brown mud and he scrapes them off with a knife, but the ones he misses deploy over him until he itches all over from their bites. Early in the afternoon he finds a little hive, and the cool sweet honey quenches his thirst and takes the edge off his hunger. Soon he comes on another, but "dangerous" stinging bees live there; and since he will not stop to make a fire drill and build a fire to smoke them out, he must leave it and return tomorrow or send someone after it. Now the sky clouds over, and it begins to rain. He stands shivering under a fern for a while, but hunger drives him out again. As the afternoon drags on his mood grows blacker and blacker as he searches the ground restlessly for a tapir's track. Nothing less than a tapir will satisfy him. But where are they? Didn't Chukembégn see tracks here yesterday when he was hunting jácutingas? But wait! What's this? Certainly a tapir has been nibbling the shoots of this bush, and there is its track. It seems fresh, too, for it is damp, and the soil appears newly scraped by the tapir's hoof. But in the rain all tracks are damp, and he is not sure that the tapir didn't nibble that bush yesterday. As he goes farther along, however, he comes upon the fresh spoor and then on the place where the tapir moved about, eating red berries that had fallen from a tree.

Now there is no doubt that the track is fresh. Tense and serious, he puts down his axe and arrows, of which he selects two with short shafts and heavy iron heads that look like table knives, round at the point but sharpened to a razor edge. As he moves along following the tapir's track he mimics its curious shrieking whistle. The trail leads through a bamboo network where rotten twigs lie thick upon the ground and the bamboo grows so high and dense that the light is dim; some of the bamboos have toppled over and dried where they have fallen. Hundreds of them lie criss-cross in every direction so that the hunter has to pick his way, twisting and turning his heavy bow so that it will not clatter and jar. He makes noise—no one could avoid it in such a jungle. But the tapir too is noisy, and there is no mistaking when its big, heavy body comes plunging awkwardly through the brush. At last the hunter draws up on the animal that has stopped to wait for him, deceived by his call; but the forest is so thick that he must get close for a shot, and indeed, the heads of his arrows are so heavy that they cannot travel far with great accuracy. But when it does leap from the bow the arrow drives through the tough hide of the tapir right to its vitals. What supreme pleasure that gives to the Indian! What pride is in that smiling brown face!

512

Back in camp the hunter does not walk around and talk unless he has come back empty-handed, for then he feels he has to say something to ex-

2: Henry E-5 (1932-1934) 1941
SM3 Caingang SM3
Aweikoma

plain how it was that he didn't kill. He walks about, telling loudly how he climbed this hill and descended that, how the thorns scratched him and how he saw no tracks. But the successful hunter sits down with the casual remark that "A tapir has been killed," and after a while, or next day, if it is late, the women go and bring it in. Before he sleeps he must mend his broken arrows, and late at night the yellow light of the dry bamboo illumines his puckered face still bent over them, while his wife sleeps with her baby against her breast. The Kaingáng do not sleep much. Even if there is no work to keep them up—no baskets for the men to weave, no arrows for them to mend—they are forever getting up to eat or to warm themselves by the fire. Before the reservation days they were a hunted people, harassed by another tribe, by the Brazilians, and by one another so that wakefulness became highly valued among them.

When the men are in camp they circulate noisily, but the women sit where they are, mingling their high-pitched voices with those of the men, taking an equal part in the conversation if it concerns anything they have any interest in. It is when the men are gone that the women come together for their own particular kind of intimate gossip: love affairs and projected separations; this one's change of heart and that one's scandalous behavior. They sit in a little group making dresses for themselves or sewing for their husbands or brothers, stopping every half hour or so to suckle their babies, who are given the breast whenever they cry, to scold a child who has defecated in a plate, to snatch another from the fire or to rub passionately a little head that has been bruised in falling. A man in the camp is an added spice to a spicy situation, and if a sprained limb or infected foot keeps him at home he becomes the focus for feminine jokes that run eternally in the same channel.

When the young women go out to pick up the fallen fruit or to gather the yellow *saí* fruit that grows in the center of a large spiked plant, they leave their babies with their old mothers or with other women to be suckled and cared for. Sometimes, if they have children who are a little grown, they may take them with them, but the Kaingáng do not feel that a woman should be accompanied by a little child so that its presence may prevent a swift and surreptitious sex encounter. They are generally free to pursue their love affairs secretly in the bush while their husbands are away, and if they cannot do that they spend their time talking about other people's affairs.

There is really very little for the women to do nowadays. Aside from their specifically feminine functions Kaingáng society could exist just as well without them. They "make the bed" and get the firewood, but their husbands help them build the house. The men hunt and also bring in most of the wild honey, for they range the farthest. It is they who climb the trees

2: Henry E-5 (1932-1934) 1941
SM3 Gaingang SM3
Aweikoma

512 462 to chop out the hives that are far above the ground, and it is they who ascend the lofty pines to knock down the all-important nuts. The women stay below to gather up the nuts which their husbands have knocked down; yet very often two men cooperate in the enterprise. The women used to take ages to make robes and shirts and carrying-bands for their babies, but ever since the men began to raid the whites, blankets have largely replaced robes, fiber shirts have given way to vests, and the heavy iron Brazilian pot [415 191] has become the "real" pot, while the ancient badly made clay one which the women made has become "my no-good pot" and completely disappeared. But there is no substitute for the strong, well-made baskets that the men make with such care. The men are even as good at spinning cord as the women are. The women cook, but Kaingáng cooking is simple and any child could do it. Besides, it is no disgrace for a man to cook or do anything a woman does, and a man often cooks his own supper if he is alone. Even the carrying of burdens is shared by the hard-working men, and I have seen them carrying their babies when the trail was long and burdens heavy.